

VZCZCXRO1370
RR RUEHMA RUEHPA
DE RUEHN #0556 2121426
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 311426Z JUL 09
FM AMEMBASSY NIAMEY
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 5223
INFO RUEHZK/ECOWAS COLLECTIVE
RHMFIS/HQ USAFRICOM STUTTGART GE
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC
RUEHLMC/MCC WASHDC

UNCLAS NIAMEY 000556

DEPT FOR AF/W AND AF/RSA
PLS PASS TO USAID FOR AFR/W
ACCRA ALSO FOR USAID/WA
PARIS FOR AFRICA WATCHER

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: ELAB PGOV SOCI KDEM NG
SUBJECT: Niger: Unions Launch Strike

Ref: a) Niamey 225 b) Niamey 536

¶1. Summary: The Inter-Union of Niger's Workers (ITN) went on strike on July 30-31 to demand salary increases and press the Government of Niger (GON) to implement agreements made with the country's labor unions. Although political discontent remains an issue with labor confederations, the strike targets salary and collective bargaining issues in part to avoid charges that its grounds for a strike are political, and hence illegitimate. End summary.

¶2. On July 24, the ITN, made up of seven labor confederations opposing President Tandja's referendum plan, notified the GON of its intention to go on strike on July 30-31 to demand a 50 percent salary increase, press the GON to implement pending agreements made with labor unions (ref a), and provide jobs opportunities for youth. When the GON did not react to the ITN's announcement, the unions commenced the strike.

¶3. On both July 30 and 31, the strike was observed partially; National Social Security Administration offices were empty, with only a few executives present. Some banks remained closed. Public sector activities were slow. Markets remained open, however, and traffic was slightly lighter than usual, with taxis and other public transport running. Union leaders reported that the strike was successful upcountry, especially in Zinder.

¶4. On July 30, Amadou Harouna Maiga, Deputy Secretary General of the Trade Union of Niger's Workers (USTN), stated on a private radio broadcast that "There are pockets where the strike was not successful...In fact, no strike gets a 100 percent response, and we respect the opinion of those who chose not to observe the strike...We will do an assessment of the strike on Saturday (August 1) and determine our next course of action." On the evening of July 30, several union leaders stated that they were "satisfied" with the strike results. On July 31, Kassoum Issa, Secretary General of the Niger's Teachers' Union (SNEN), indicated that the impact of the strike would have been stronger during the academic year because the educational sector (now on summer vacation) makes up at least 40 percent of the country's workforce in the formal sector.

¶5. Comment: The strike notice did not follow the ITN's main platform, which is to press President Tandja to repeal his August 4 referendum plan and other decisions taken under his exercise of "emergency powers," including reinstating the ousted Constitutional Court. The ITN, however, undertook this strategy to avoid challenge from the GON. On two occasions (June 17 and July 22) the GON filed a lawsuit before the Tribunal of Niamey, which declared the strike proposed by the ITN (ref B) to be illegal, as it involved political rather than labor issues. End comment.

ALLEN